

Who is My Neighbor?

By: Calvin Evans

“But he, willing to justify himself, said to unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?” - Luke 10:29

Who is my neighbor? Jesus was asked this question by a lawyer, who was asking, “What to do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus answered the lawyer’s question by asking him two more questions: “*What is written in the law? how readest thou?*” (Luke 10:26). The lawyer answered, “*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself*” (Luke 10:27). Jesus responded to the lawyer by saying, “*Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live*” (Luke 10:28). But the lawyer, “*Willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?*” (verse 29).

This is when Jesus spoke the parable often called the “**Parable of the Good Samaritan.**” He began by saying, “*A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho.*” He places this event as taking place on the “Jericho Road.” First, let’s take a look at:

The Road

1. It is a downward road. It is some 18 miles long which connects Jerusalem (The City of God) to Jericho (The city with a curse upon it). Jerusalem is about 2,300 feet above sea-level and

Jericho is about 1,300 feet below sea-level. As you travel this road today, you are aware you are traveling down. There is a road sign when you reach sea-level. Jericho is near the Dead Sea the lowest spot on earth.

When Joshua marched around Jericho and God destroyed it, He also placed a curse upon it. Joshua 6:26 says, “*. . . Cursed be the man before the Lord, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho: he shall lay the foundation thereof in his firstborn...*” While visiting Jericho, I’ve had guides tell me bone-chilling stories about what happened to families involved in rebuilding this city.

2. It is a dangerous road. It is cut out through the Judean hills. This road is not safe for travelers.

Its narrow gorges and sharp turns make it very dangerous to travel. If one accidentally fell off one of the embankments, it meant almost certain death, since it would be hundreds of feet to the bottom. I’ve traveled this road and believe me it is one of the most dangerous roads I’ve ever seen.

3. It is a desolate road. This makes it an ideal place for robbers. The first time I traveled this road it reminded me of pictures I had seen of the moon. The “**Valley of the Shadow of Death**” is located in this area. In the fifth century, Jerome tells us that it was still called, “The Red and Bloody Way.” Even as late as the 19th century travelers had to pay safety money to local sheiks if they wished to be safe from the attacks of the Bedouin. ⁽¹⁾

The Robbers

As this man traveled the Jericho Road, he encountered three kinds of people who had three different philosophies of life. The philosophy of the robber was, “*What is thine is mine, and I’m*



A Samaritan with the Torah

going to take it.” This traveler “...Fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead” (Luke 10:30). I’ve just mentioned, what happened to this man in Jesus’ day was still taking place in the fifth century and also in the 19th century. Do you think this philosophy is no longer prevalent today? Let chaos and catastrophe strike a city, what is the first thing you see on TV? Mobs will break into stores and take away everything they can carry. Why do they do this? They are living by the philosophy, **“What is thine is mine, and I’m going to take it.”**

The Religionists

The next two men we meet in this parable are representatives of religion. They also live by a philosophy: **“What is mine is mine and I’m going to keep it.”** **The first was a priest.** He, by chance, came that way. When he saw the poor man lying there wounded, naked and dying, he passed by on the other side. Since many priests lived in Jericho, he undoubtedly was on his way to or from the Temple. There were so many priests that they were divided into 24 courses. Each course served in the Temple for two separate weeks in the year.⁽²⁾

The priests were the most religious men of their day. They were the direct descendants of Aaron. It was their job to perform and carry out the ritualistic observances in the Temple. One thing was obvious with this priest, he was totally indifferent to the plight of this fellow human being. He passed him by perhaps to get to the Temple to carry out his ritualistic duties or even worse, to get back home. He may have known all the rituals of Temple worship, but he was certainly lacking in love and compassion for others. He believed, **“What is mine is mine and I’m going to keep it.”**

Next, there was a Levite who represents the law. He came and looked at the man, but he, too, passed by on the other side. He was more curious than the priest, but that is as far as it went.

The Levites served as assistants to the priests in the worship system of Israel. They prepared the showbread. They helped the priests slaughter and skin the animals for the sacrifices, examined the lepers according to the law and led the music during the worship.⁽³⁾ They assisted the priests in many other ways.

The Levite, while more curious than the priest, followed in the very same steps and passed by on the other side. He showed curiosity but no compassion. He was not willing to put himself at any risk whatsoever to help this poor dying man. It is evident that his philosophy was: **“What is mine is mine and I’m going to keep it.”**

What about Christians? Do some of them have the same attitude? If you try to raise support to help some worthy cause you’ll find that many take this same position today.

The Rescuer

Now the last man to come on the scene in this parable is an unknown Samaritan. He is the most unlikely man to help this poor traveler, whom most scholars agree was a Jew. If the priest and the Levite (who were also Jews) would not help him, why would a Samaritan?

The Samaritan was hated by the Jew. They had no dealings with each other. As a matter of fact this caused a dilemma for Jesus. The Samaritans called him a Jew (John 4:9) and the Jews called him a Samaritan (John 8:48).

Who were these Samaritans? Without going into a lot of details, one writer summed it up by saying: The Samaritans were half Jew and half Gentile. They descended from the mixed population of the eighth century B.C. Jews did not associate with them . . . Jesus told the memorable parable of the Good Samaritan, in which a Samaritan did for a Jew what no Jew would ever do for a Samaritan” (Luke 10:25-34).⁽⁴⁾

Another writer points out, “In the eyes of the Jew, there was no such thing as a ‘Good’ Samaritan, every Samaritan was a dirty dog in the Jews mind. In fact, if a Jew was walking down the road and the shadow of a Samaritan crossed his path, immediately he went to the nearest public bathhouse for a bath.”⁽⁵⁾



Now that brings us to the third philosophy: *“What is mine is thine if you need it.”* When the Samaritan saw the injured man, *“He took pity on him.”* He was moved with compassion. He immediately responded to the need according to his ability. He had on hand oil to soothe and wine to cleanse, and he poured these on the man’s injuries and also bandaged them. Because it was impossible for the injured man to be properly cared for where he was, the Samaritan put him on his donkey, transported him to an inn, and entrusted him to the care of the innkeeper. The Samaritan paid for the man’s keep, promising the innkeeper that when he returned he would make a full reimbursement for any extra cost that had been involved. (6)

It was the Samaritan’s actions which Jesus commended and He said, *“Go, and do thou likewise”* (Luke 10:37). There was no question as to whom the good neighbor was. May we all learn something from this outstanding parable.

Notes:

William Barclay, *And Jesus Said* (Pennsylvania: The Westminster Press, 1970), pg. 79

Ibid., pg. 80

Herbert Lockyer, Sr. Editor, *Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986), pg. 664

John Stott, *The Incomparable Christ* (Illinois: Intersity Press, 2001), pg. 35

Raymond Barber, *Dear Lord, Tell Me What To Do* (Tennessee: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 2003), pg. 47

J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Parable of Jesus* (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), pgs. 74-75